Integrating General English with Military English through POA: A Case Study of the "Tactical Hand Signs" Lesson

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Abstract: Military English teaching has long faced the dilemma of "separation of learning and application", where the learning of general English is disconnected from its application in military scenarios. This paper, based on the Production-Oriented Approach (POA) as its theoretical framework, taking the listening and speaking session of the unit Body Language in Communication in *New Horizon English Course* as an example, explores a listening and speaking instructional design for integrated "General English + Military English". The study adopts a dual approach of level-clearing task-driven design and the integration of ideological and political education throughout the entire process. It aligns the three stages of POA, namely "Motivating, Enabling, and assessing", with three task levels. The findings indicate that the "re-contextualization" of General English vocabulary in military contexts is a feasible integration mechanism. The level-clearing mechanism forms a dual-layered motivation system of "macro-motivation + micro-motivation", and embedding the ideological and political theme into the task itself can avoid the "labeling" type of integration. In general, this study offers a transferable design model for embedding Military English components into the General English teaching stage.

Keywords: Production-Oriented Approach; General English + Military English; Level-Clearing Task-Driven Teaching; Ideological-Political Education; Tactical Hand Signs

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

Military English teaching has long been confronted with a core contradiction: After cadets have completed a period of General English learning and have acquired a certain amount of vocabulary and basic listening and speaking skills, when they enter the specialized Military English learning stage, they commonly find themselves "unable to speak and afraid to speak," a phenomenon of "separation of learning and application." The problem is in the gap between EGP instruction and ESP needs — General English classes do not teach the language usage rules in military situations, whereas in Military English classrooms instructors tend to think that cadets already have sufficient language background, so there are no transitional bridges for cadets to transfer their linguistic competence to military situations.

The solution to this dilemma might not lie in waiting until the specialized Military English stage to "catch up", but in integrating Military English elements into the General English learning process right at the beginning. The present lesson exemplar is based on this concept and is designed with reference to the Body Language in Communication unit of New Horizon English Course. The listening-and-speaking session of this unit lasts for two class periods (90 minutes). The first period of the lesson is devoted to body language in General English; the second period of the lesson (this lesson) develops further into body language in military situations — tactical hand signs. After their learning in the first period, cadets have already mastered the common expressions of body language. During the second period, they transition easily into the military situations and achieve cognitive shift from the everyday to military situations.

Meanwhile, empirical research on the POA in Military English teaching has initially shown that the classroom design based on POA "has played a positive role in alleviating cadets' fear of using military English and improving their communication skills in military English"[1]. The three-step model of motivating, enabling, and assessing in POA offers a viable pedagogical route towards the transfer of general English

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competence to military situations [2].

1.2 Research Questions

Based on POA, this study, with the "Tactical Hand Signs" lesson as an example, focuses on the following three key issues:

Question 1: How can the combination of "General English + Military" facilitate the successful transfer of general language abilities to communicative military proficiency?

This lesson exemplar provides a four-level, cumulative transfer channel between vocabulary, sentence patterns, discourse and task-based application. General English words are given military-specific connotations at the lexical level through re-contextualization. The dual semantics of every lexical item are expected to be mastered by cadets. The general English syntactic patterns used in the functions of defining or explaining and negotiating or confirming have been assigned specific purposes of tactical hand sign communication in military situations at the syntactic level. On the discourse level, the fundamental consciousness of conversational organization acquired during General English learning (e.g. questioning → answering → confirmation) is applied to three-step chain of dialogue (describing a gesture → confirming understanding → reaching agreement) in military negotiations. At the task level, this lesson exemplar changes the context of daily communication to the China-Cambodia joint exercise of urban hostage rescue—a real-life military mission setting, called Golden Dragon 2024.

Through this four-step chain, cadets complete the transition between cognition and language, thus preparing a good basis for their further professional Military English studies.

Question 2: How do the level-clearing tasks as the organization of the three POA phases of "motivating-enabling-assessing" sustain cadets' ongoing production motivation?

This lesson is also based on the context of China-Cambodia Golden Dragon 2024 exercise and it has been designed to combine the three levels with the three stages of POA, in order to make a two-level mechanism of motivation. The macro-motivation comes as a result of the pre-class cognitive gaps and the final outcome of the role-play task. At the same time, the micro-cycle of each of the three levels is a full-fledged "Motivating-Enabling-Assessing" cycle. Each level that is completed is an incentive to the subsequent level (the platform gives cadets an impression of having achieved a level and this leads to the realization that there will be a new challenge at the next level) and consecutive levels form a feedback loop: a cadet who has just finished one level is immediately motivated by the feeling of accomplishment but at the same time knows what awaits him/her at the next level.

Question 3: How is the integration of ideological and political learning as one of the two routes combined with, instead of just overlaid on language learning?

The combination of ideological and political education in this lesson does not merely introduce ideological-political content into the language teaching. Rather, it incorporates the ideological and political themes into the activities of every level so that cadets can naturally undergo the ideological and political themes as they do the language tasks, thus a coupled design in which the task itself is ideological-political education. At Level 1, precise language usage is combined with a sense of responsibility. At Level 2, the sentence patterns used for negotiation and confirmation link language practice with the establishment of cooperative trust. At Level 3, the hostage rescue role-play connects the negotiation output with the mission of peace protection. The ideological and political objective and the language objective are tied together by completing the task.

1.3 Research Significance

At the theoretical level, this study expands the applicability of POA in military ESP scenarios, and proposes a specific integration mechanism of "military re-contextualization of General English vocabulary". Also, it structurally correlates the three stages of POA with the level-clearing task design, and proposes a dual-tier motivation-sustaining model of "macro-motivation + micro-motivation."[3]

At the practical level, this research provides a transferable design model for integrating Military English elements into the General English teaching stage, and offers a replicable template for the dual-track design of "language + ideological-political education" in Military English classrooms. [4]

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 The Theoretical Core of POA and Its Applicability to Military English Teaching

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POA was proposed by Wen Qiufang, with its core being the "Learning-Centered Principle," the "Learning-Using Integrated Principle," and the "Whole-Person Education Principle." Its teaching process consists of three phases of "Motivating-Enabling-Assessing." The flexibility of POA in Military English teaching can be seen in several ways: first, the so-called Motivating stage involves the establishment of cognitive gaps, and the authentic tasks in military contexts are natural to serve this purpose; secondly, the so-called Enabling stage implies that instructors create language scaffolds, which is ideally suited to the profile of Military English cadets: they know what military situations look like but lack proper linguistic means to express them; thirdly, the so-called Assessing stage focuses on immediate feedback, and the need for accuracy in military operations makes assessment an urgent task [5]. Xiao Xue et al. have done an empirical study using Military English Listening and Speaking Course as a basis, and the findings indicated that the POA method could greatly increase the level of classroom participation among cadets and the quality of oral output [1].

2.2 Integration Logic of General English + Military English

EGP and ESP are not opposed to each other but stand in a foundation–application relationship [6]. It was mentioned by Pan Guangqin that the teaching of ESP will be successful only with the background knowledge of General English [7]. However, most existing studies have focused mainly on the EGP+ESP integration during the specialized Military English stage, and have paid insufficient attention to the issue of "how to lay the groundwork for Military English during the General English learning stage". The approach used in this lesson is to start off with the military re-contextualization of the vocabulary of General English and then apply the study of the second period of class into the context of the military environment as part of the general English unit. Words such as "clear", "execute" and "neutralize" have specific meanings in the military context; this type of "one lexical item, dual semantics" contrast is precisely the pedagogical starting point for EGP-to-ESP transfer.

2.3 Research Progress on Ideological-Political Education in Military English Courses

The core mechanism of integrating ideological and political education into foreign language courses is "mapping" — viewing the enhancement of ideological and political literacy as a process of meaning construction, and achieving the integration of ideological-political and knowledge objectives through the integration of meaning at the holistic and local levels [8]. The uniqueness of Military English ideological and political education lies in the need to achieve the integrated development of linguistic competence, military literacy, and values orientation [9]. This lesson example takes "responsibility-trust-mission" as its main thread, embedding the ideological and political theme into the tasks of each level [10].

3. Instructional Design

3.1 Instructional Analysis

Table 1 provides a summary of the analysis on the instruction. The table is based on the main elements of the teaching design that are the participants, time, source unit, core case, production task and teaching sources.

Table 1. Instructional Analysis

Dimension	Content
Instructing subjects	Freshmen in college
Class duration	45 minutes (the second period of the unit's listening and speaking)
Source unit	Unit 6 Body Language in Communication, *New Horizons English Course*
Core case	China-Cambodia "Golden Dragon 2024" Joint Exercise on Urban Hostage Rescue
Production task	Chinese and Cambodian soldiers discuss and standardize tactical hand signs
Teaching platforms	Chaoxing Learning Platform, the self-developed *Lijianzhengfeng* competition platform, and the AI speaking partner on the smart teaching platform

Intra-unit Transition Design: The first class (45 minutes) is about body language in General English and finishes the listening and speaking exercises at the General English level. The second class (45 minutes) uses the bridging question "What if verbal communication is not an option in a military operation?" to shift the discussion of body language from everyday contexts to military ones.

3.2 Alignment of the Three POA Phases with "Level-Clearing" Tasks

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This lesson is designed in a way that it unfolds within the China-Cambodia hostage rescue scenario in the urban environment, which is known as Golden Dragon 2024. It creates three levels which are to be cleared in order to achieve a qualitative jump between cognition and application and then commitment to mission by cadets. Table 2 shows the correlation between the level-clearing activities and the stages of the POA.

Table 2. Alignment between POA Phases and Level-Clearing Tasks

POA Phase	Level-Clearing Module	Core Activities	Language scaffolding	Ideological-political theme
Motivating	Pre-class preview on Chaoxing	vocabulary learning + video watching + pre-test	to create a cognitive gap	—
Enabling	Level 1: Decode & Shoulder Responsibility	Vocabulary pronunciation correction and meaning discrimination + action matching + platform recording	vocabulary scaffolding	Striving for excellence, responsibility in heart
Enabling	Level 2: Bridge and Build Trust.	Sentence pattern induction and AI language partner practice.	sentence pattern scaffold	cooperation and collaboration, trust in action
Enabling + Producing	Level 3: Mission and Duty.	Role-play + presentation and assessment	Complete output	Defend the country, protect the peace

Note: The phase of Assessing is incorporated in the modules of clearing each level (in-class real time assessment) and also during the post class evaluation.

3.3 Integration Points Design for General English and Military English

Re-contextualization on the lexical level. Level 1 is devoted to two words that are often confused, namely neutralize and execute. The instructor especially highlights the military meaning of "execute" — to perform an action, but not to kill a person — and this distinction of meanings is exactly what the transfer between EGP vocabulary and ESP vocabulary is all about.

Functionalized syntactic transfer. In the second level, there are two sentence patterns that can be extracted: one is for describing a tactical hand sign (This gesture means... We use it when...) and the other is for agreeing on a tactical hand sign (Do we agree that...means...for both sides?). The first sentence pattern refers to the General English definition/explanation and the second one to the General English negotiation/confirmation.

Output at the task level based on scenarios. During the role-play activity of Level 3, cadets have to discuss and reconcile two differences in tactical hand signs: Chinese side uses a shoulder tap to indicate advance whereas Cambodian side uses a knee nudge; during withdrawal, Chinese troops disperse simultaneously towards both flanks, but their Cambodian counterparts withdraw sequentially: one soldier goes first, then the rest. Cadets must explain the difference, negotiate solutions, and agree with each other in English.

3.4 Design Logic of Level-Clearing Tasks

The three levels are designed in a progressive logic of cognition - application - mission: the first level deals with knowing what it is, the second level deals with knowing how to say it, and the third level deals with being able to use it in authentic scenarios. The ideological-political enlightenment at the end of each level corresponds to the language objectives: the responsibility theme of the first level corresponds to precise actions; the trust theme of the second level corresponds to negotiation and confirmation; and the mission theme of the third level corresponds to collaborative actions.

The level-clearing tasks are what change the objectives of learning into the tangible levels. The process of completing tasks and getting feedback gives cadets a sense of accomplishment of clearing the levels. The completed level is the micro-motivation to the next level.

3.5 Supporting Role of Smart Platforms

This lesson forms a complete teaching loop by relying on three types of intelligent tools. Chaoxing Learning Platform helps preview materials before class, statistics of test results before class and the issuance and grading of assignments with differentiation after class; the self-developed Lijianzhengfeng competitive platform helps vocabulary recording and evaluation, listening test and real-time statistics of scores during class for group competition; the AI language partner offered by the smart teaching platform can provide one-on-one conversation practice and give real-time evaluation and feedback on pronunciation, fluency and vocabulary accuracy of cadets.

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4. Teaching Implementation and the Effects Analysis

4.1 Pre-Class Motivating: Creating a Cognitive Gap

The instructor uploads the vocabulary learning materials, a video about 4 tactical hand signs with subtitles, an English report of the China-Cambodia joint exercise, and four multiple-choice listening questions to the Chaoxing Learning Platform before class. The platform provides an error report of the class as well as personal errors. Data show that cadets exhibit relatively high error rates for the pronunciation of neutralize and execute, and many misinterpret the meaning of execute (confusing "carrying out a tactical action" with "execution / killing"). This pre-test result provides a basis for targeted teaching in class.

4.2 In-Class Enabling: Building Progressive Language Scaffolding across Three Levels

Level 1: Vocabulary Scaffolding. The first thing the instructor does is to teach the pronunciation of two words, neutralize and execute, and then makes a meaning distinction between them. Next, the instructor plays four tactical hand sign videos (without subtitles), requiring cadets to say the English names while watching, so as to check the results of their pre-class preview. Then, based on cadets' performance, the instructor explains and reads aloud the English expressions for the four tactical actions. Then, after a pair work in which one does the action and the other describes it in English, cadets are given a recording test on the Lijianzhengfeng website, where they are shown images of the actions of four tactical hand signs, and they must say the English expressions of these actions. Finally, through listening practice and group discussion, cadets summarize the meanings of the four tactical hand signs. By clearing this level, cadets have mastered the English descriptions of the four tactical hand sign actions and their corresponding tactical meanings.

Level 2: Sentence-Pattern Scaffolding. The instructor guides cadets to conduct a second round of listening practice first. Cadets listen and make notes on sentences that are used to describe and negotiate tactical hand signs, and summarize two core sentence patterns using the word cloud feature of the Lijianzhengfeng platform. After this, cadets have one-on-one conversation practice with an AI language partner. The AI language partner is pre-programmed to use the vocabulary and sentence patterns of this lesson, giving real-time feedback on cadets' pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy of word choice. The instructor monitors the dialogues between cadets and their AI language partners on the monitoring screen of the platform and records common problems.

Level 3: Comprehensive Output. The role-play task is given by the instructor: in a situation prior to the urban hostage rescue mission during the China-Cambodia joint exercise Golden Dragon 2024, Chinese and Cambodian soldiers should come to an agreement on a set of tactical hand signals. Cadets are put in pairs and discuss the differences in English and reach a consensus, and one or two groups are randomly chosen to present in class.

4.3 After-Class Assessment and Ideological-Political Outcomes

The instructor posts differentiated assignments on Chaoxing after class depending on how cadets perform in the classroom. After cadets have submitted their assignments through Chaoxing, they are initially scored with the help of AI and then checked and confirmed by the instructor. Lastly, the instructor gives individual feedback according to the overall assignment performance of cadets.

Judging from the performance of cadets in the role-play, the topic of "commitment to mission" was conveyed naturally — when negotiating and unifying hand signs, cadets were able to use the sentence pattern, "Do we agree that... means... for both sides?", actively, and made the same gesture after reaching a consensus, demonstrating the integration of language and ideological-political objectives [4].

5. Conclusion

Taking unit 6 Body Language in Communication in New Horizon English Course as a case, this lesson explores how to integrate Military English elements at General English learning stage. This paper demonstrates that the three-step process of POA and the level-clearing tasks can be successfully used in the process of transferring knowledge between daily communication and military dialogue; the military re-contextualization of vocabularies of General English is a possible way of transfer; the ideological-political factor is inherent in the classroom activities as well, which results in the triple combination of linguistic skills, military

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literacy and value orientation.

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